



**U.S. Department
of State**



**Homeland
Security**

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative?

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will require all travelers, including U.S. citizens, to and from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Bermuda to have a passport or other accepted document that establishes the bearer's identity and nationality to enter or re-enter the United States. This is a change from prior travel requirements. The goal is to strengthen border security and facilitate entry into the United States for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors.

Who will the Travel Initiative affect?

The travel document initiative will affect all United States citizens traveling within the Western Hemisphere, who will now be required to carry a passport or other accepted document.

It will also affect certain foreign nationals who currently are not required to present a passport to travel to the United States namely most Canadian citizens, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda and Mexican citizens.

When will Travel Initiative be implemented?

In the proposed implementation plan, which is subject to a period of initial public comment, the Initiative will be rolled out in phases, providing as much advance notice as possible to the affected public to enable them to meet the terms of the new guidelines. The proposed timeline will be as follows:

- **December 31, 2006** – Requirement applied to all air and sea travel to or from Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.
- **December 31, 2007** – Requirement extended to all land border crossings as well as air and sea travel

I thought there was an additional phase to be implemented on December 31, 2005. Is this a change?

In April 2005, the Departments of State (DOS) and Homeland Security (DHS) announced a proposed plan to be implemented in three phases beginning on December 31, 2005 for the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. After further review and considering the delay in publishing the public notice in the Federal Register, DOS and DHS recognized that implementing the December 31, 2005, phase would be problematic for travelers during the upcoming winter tourism season. This change will simplify the implementation and provide a longer lead-time for travelers to come into compliance with the requirements.

How Do I get a passport?

United States citizens can visit the State Department's travel website www.travel.state.gov, or call the U.S. National Passport Information Center: 1-877-4USA-PPT; TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-7793.

You should allow yourself a sufficient amount of time to apply and receive your passport in advance of travel. Please allow 6 weeks for processing of your passport application if you apply from inside the U.S.. If you need to travel urgently and require a passport sooner, please visit <http://www.travel.state.gov> for additional information. Overseas passport processing times vary; you should contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for specific information.

Peak domestic passport processing is between January and July. For faster service, we recommend applying between August and December.

Foreign nationals should contact their respective governments to obtain passports.

Other than a passport, what types of documents will be acceptable under this initiative?

The passport is the document of choice right now because of security features and general availability. Individuals traveling within the Western Hemisphere are encouraged to obtain a passport.

For land border crossings, other documents that we are considering for acceptance under this Initiative are SENTRI, NEXUS and FAST program cards. These are current international frequent traveler programs (see www.cbp.gov for further information).

We anticipate that the Border Crossing Card, (BCC – also known as “laser visa”) will also be acceptable as a substitute for a passport and a visa for citizens of Mexico traveling to the United States from contiguous territory.

No currently existing documents other than the BCC, SENTRI, NEXUS or FAST cards are under active consideration as substitutes for the passport. The Departments of Homeland Security and State are working to determine acceptable alternative documents other than a passport as soon as possible. We are using new technologies to create other acceptable travel documents. We will make public additional travel document options as they become available.

Why is the U.S. Government implementing the Travel Initiative?

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) mandated that the U.S. Secretaries of Homeland Security and State develop and implement a plan to require U.S. citizens and foreign nationals to present a passport or other appropriate secure identity and citizenship documentation when entering the United States.

For many years U.S. citizens, and some citizens of other countries in the Western Hemisphere including Canadians, have not been required to present a passport or other specific forms of secure identification to enter the U.S. Instead, a wide variety of less secure documentation have historically been accepted.

In light of the new security efforts, the United States is requiring travelers to have a passport or other accepted secure document for entry into the United States.

Can the general public provide input into the planning and implementation of the Travel Initiative?

The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), and State (DOS) are issuing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) in the Federal Register to provide vital information on the plan to the public and to request input and/or comment on the suggested documents and possible alternative documents that can meet the statutory requirements. DHS and DOS expect to issue a more formal rule later this year following review of those comments to implement the first phase of the Initiative. This rule will take into account comments received from the ANPRM as well as soliciting further comments on the rulemaking itself.

The government expects that acceptable documents must establish the citizenship and identity of the bearer through electronic data verification and will include significant security features. Ultimately, all documents used for travel to the United States are expected to include biometrics that can be used to authenticate the document and verify identity.

How will the Travel Initiative impact travel at the land borders?

DHS and the State Department understand that the greatest potential change will occur at the land borders. The new statute specifically mandates that the concerns of border communities be considered. We recognize the implications this might have for industry, business and the general public, as well as our neighboring countries, and they are important partners in this initiative. The advanced notice of proposed rule making will allow these affected publics to voice concern and provide ideas for alternate documents.

Will this requirement apply to travel between the United States and Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands?

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will not affect travel between the United States and its territories. U.S. citizens traveling between the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa will continue to be able to use established forms of identification to board flights and for entry.

If traveling outside the United States or a U.S. territory, a passport or other secure document will be required. For example, a person may travel to and from the United States to the U.S. Virgin islands without a passport or other secure document, but under proposed regulations, a passport or other secure document would be required to re-enter the U.S. Virgin Islands from the British Virgin Islands or another country as of December 31, 2006.